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El Salvador: Human Rights
Special Project (1993)

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POL 13-12-
Right Wing
Violence

DETAILED EVIDENCE OF GOVERNMENT VIOLENCE
AGAINST NON GUERRILLA ELEMENTS

Most of the 20,000 or more deaths in El Salvador within the past 18 months cannot be attributed with any degree of reliability. In its weekly reports on violence, the Embassy has been unable to identify the majority of the victims or the affiliation of those who did the killing. Specific detailed evidence is lacking on virtually all cases, but there are certain notorious cases of violence by Government elements against non-guerrilla elements.

Soyapango (working-class suburb of the capital) April 7, 1981. Thirty civilians were killed by the Treasury Police. Witnesses claim that 23 men were dragged from their homes and shot and another seven shot inside their homes when they resisted. The official explanation was that the patrol was conducting house-to-house searches for leftist guerrillas and was fired upon; the 30 civilians were killed in the firefight. The Embassy after a careful investigation characterized the official report as not credible.

Armenia, July 30, 1981. Twenty-three or perhaps more residents of this town, some 25 miles west of the capital, were dragged from their homes after curfew, killed and their bodies dumped in nearby areas. The incident is believed to have grown out of a dispute at an army checkpoint. The victims were members of a local soccer team and their families. Witnesses identified the Army as perpetrators of the massacre. Garcia confirmed to Ambassador Hinton the Army's probable culpability.

Murder of four American women, night of December 2-3, 1980. This is the most notorious instance of violence by security forces at least in the US. The three nuns and a lay missionary were killed by members of the Guardia Nacional. Six members of the Guardia have been detained for involvement in the murders. FBI assistance in ballistic and fingerprint identification were instrumental in the detention. The case is bogged down since evidence of this type is not admissible and there are no witnesses against the Guardia members. Embassy has no evidence that orders for the murder came from high levels within the Guardia, but it is unlikely that guilt is limited to the six detained. A low ranking individual of the National Police might be linked to these murders.

Murder of six opposition leaders, November 27, 1980. Six leaders of the broad-front opposition group, the Revolutionary

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Democratic Front, were kidnapped on November 27, 1980 as they were about to hold a new conference at the San Jose High School in San Salvador. The Deputy Foreign Minister within a couple of hours of their abduction confirmed to our Ambassador that the six were in government custody. The bodies of the six were later found at a lake near El Salvador's international airport, east of the capital San Salvador. The bullet-ridden corpses showed signs of torture, dismemberment and strangulation.

The leading perpetrator of violence on the Government side is the Guardia Nacional; the Hacienda police can be vicious, but there are fewer of them; the Army has brutalized and tortured civilians as well. According to the document attached (Spanish) from AIFLD six members of the Salvadoran Campesino Association (UCS) founded by AIFLD were murdered by members of the Security Forces or Armed Forces or by the death squads, usually a euphemism for the security or military forces. They were murdered when they pressed their claim for land, the implication being that they were working on behalf of the old landowners.

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Violence in El Salvador
September 1980 - July 1981
Weekly terrorism death tolls

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